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The Sacraments 225- Volleyball

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Reflection Paper

A class discussion that I found to be incredibly intriguing was the issue of whether or not a person must go to Church in order to be a good Christian. In my opinion, regular attendance to Church is definitely beneficial and positive and can help many a parishioner to develop a personal relationship with God. However, I do not believe that it is a requirement for a person to be a good Christian and I do not think that Church is useful to everyone because it has become an obligation to many parishioners, not a voluntary act that truly means something to that person.

There is no denying that the Bible has been interpreted for thousands of years by many scholars to mandate that regular Church attendance is necessary for all Christians. God told Moses that he wanted his followers to keep the Sabbath as a holy day of rest (Exodus 16:23). Yet, in the New Testament, we are given various examples of how Jesus disobeyed this interpretation and the law that no work was to be performed on the Sabbath. In Matthew 12:1-15, Jesus defended His disciples for performing work on the Sabbath and He Himself broke the law by traveling the streets and healing all those He could as opposed to spending His time praying in Church. Here, to me, it seems that Jesus valued effective use of time, healing, saving, and spreading the Word of God. He wanted His disciples to perform good works, which He deemed more important than the laws of the Sabbath. There are many other examples of such actions by both Jesus and

His followers. Surely, Jesus and His disciples, the founders of the Catholic Church, were good Christians. It therefore follows, that as long as you perform good works, lead a good life, and spread the Word of God that you can be a good Christian even if you do not regularly attend Church.

Another important point to consider is the purpose of Mass. According to Bouley, author of Catholic Rites Today, “the purpose of [mass] is to help the assembled people to become a worshipping community and to prepare them for listening to God’s word and celebrating the Eucharist” (265). Clearly, if a person considers Mass to be a burden or an obligation, then her participation in the Mass is actually adverse to the intended purpose. The negative energy does not help to create a unified “worshipping community” and if the person is not paying attention, if the rites and symbols become insignificant to her, then the Mass is meaningless to that person. Wouldn’t this person’s time be better directed toward something positive such as a visit to an invalid friend or relation or some other good deed?

Additionally, if Mass was emphasized as a free choice rather than an obligation or a requirement to be a good Christian, more people may actually feel compelled to intend. Take the alcohol situation as an example. In many European countries, there is no legal age barrier for the consumption of alcoholic drinks. In contrast, America has set the legal age at 21. European teens are generally not compelled to drink compulsively. Binge drinking is virtually nonexistent. American teens rebel through alcohol and alcohol related problems plague college campuses. In Europe, free choice is presented and even the very young are making the right choice. There is no obligation, rule, or law- there is nothing to rebel against and no pressure, but people, who are inherently good since they

are created in the image of God, make the right choice. If Church was a choice, it is possible that many would still make that choice. Also, those who did continue to attend Church would actually truly wish to be there. This would help to create a unified and directed community of worship and the symbols and rites would reach a maximum significance where all those who participate would experience them fully.

I feel at this point that I should make it clear that I do regularly attend Church and I have since I was very young. There was a point in my life that I questioned the usefulness of weekly attendance since I felt that each week was a repetition of the last. Still, my parents, conservative Catholics, demanded that I continue to attend Mass. I began to use this time to reflect. I thought about my life, how I could change, what I did wrong, and the sins that I had committed. Eventually, as I matured and my life was suddenly not as simple as it once was, I began to listen to the priest, to pay attention once again. But, now, the liturgy, and especially the homily, meant something to me. As a child, I listened, but I did not understand. As a young adult, I was able to relate to the situations, I was able to relate to Jesus, I was able to relate to God. The priest offered advice and perspective. I developed a full relationship with God through Church. Church became a positive and beneficial experience. Yet, I still believe all I have written in the previous pages. For, when I doubted the usefulness of Mass, it meant nothing to me. When I was a child, I listened, but it meant nothing to me. I could not relate, I did not understand. It was only when I was open to the experience and ready that Church actually meant something to me and enhanced the person that I have become. I believe that Church is a means to better oneself, to reflect, and to relate to God, but it is not for everyone and only those we are open and willing will appreciate Church for what it really

is. For these reasons, I do not believe that Church should be a requirement for someone to be a good Christian. I believe that there are people out there who believe in God and His Word, but get nothing out of the rites of the Mass. There are people out there who perform great acts but do not attend Church. The brain surgeon who misses Mass because she is saving a life is certainly not a bad Christian. The single mom who misses Mass to care for her sick child is certainly not a bad Christian. Are these people worse than the miserable, mean, and selfish weekly attendee? I believe that Jesus has demonstrated that Church is not always the most important factor. I also believe that only those who feel that they can benefit and participate should attend Mass and that attendance should be a free choice, not an obligation. I believe that a good Christian should be valued not for attendance at Church, but as someone who follows God's Word, who leads a good life, and who attempts to help those in need.